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Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 67/141. It provides an overview of the discussions held by the Commission for Social Development during its fifty-first session on the priority theme of promoting the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. It highlights the critical role of the empowerment of people as an approach to the advancement of social development and the importance of integrating fully and effectively the social dimension of sustainable development into the global development agenda beyond 2015.

The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. In resolution 67/141, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the Commission for Social Development had primary responsibility for the follow-up to, and review of, the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the question to the Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

2. The present report summarizes the discussions of the fifty-first session of the Commission for Social Development, with particular focus on the priority theme of promoting the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. The first part of the present report reviews the concept of the empowerment of people and discusses policies and strategies for the promotion of an enabling environment. It addresses the special needs of Africa and the least developed countries, as well as progress achieved in the implementation of programmes related to social groups and social integration. The second part of the report focuses on the effective integration of the social dimension of sustainable development into the global development agenda beyond 2015. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for the consideration of the General Assembly.

II. Issues before the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-first session

A. Priority theme: promoting the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration, full employment and decent work for all

1. Linkages to the World Summit for Social Development

3. At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, Heads of State and Government acknowledged the urgent need to tackle profound social challenges — foremost among them poverty, unemployment and social exclusion — and pledged to address both underlying structural causes and their consequences, in order to reduce uncertainty and insecurity in the lives of people.

4. The social challenges identified at the Summit persist today and their negative consequences have intensified, as increasingly complex and interrelated new global challenges have emerged. Following the recent global financial and economic crisis, challenges such as widening inequality, high and volatile food and fuel prices and menacing environmental risks, have become even more prominent and have been frustrating many efforts to promote social development aimed at enhancing the well-being and quality of life of people.

5. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development[1] placed empowerment and participation at the heart of advancing social development. They envisioned empowered people optimizing their capacities, resources and opportunities, leading healthy and productive lives, exercising their rights and responsibilities to be active

[1] A/CONF.166/9, chap. I, annexes I and II.

in their communities and as partners in development. The empowerment of people, therefore, was considered central to achieving the overarching goals of the World Summit for Social Development: poverty eradication, social integration and full and productive employment and decent work for all.

2. An enabling environment for empowerment

6. The concept of empowerment has been a byword at the United Nations for many years, referring mainly to the promotion of the rights and enhancement of the capabilities and functioning of marginalized and disadvantaged social groups, including women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, youth and older persons.[2] However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition that the empowerment of people needs to go beyond group-specific approaches. Rather, it should embrace a holistic view based on the goal of people-centred development.

7. The empowerment of people has two dimensions that are mutually reinforcing. It is a process of self-development and a tool for enhancing the capabilities of individuals. At the same time, it involves transforming people as the principal resource for the achievement of development goals. Empowerment derives from and builds on the intrinsic resource of human beings themselves and their inner potential for taking ownership of their own destiny. Meaningful participation is, therefore, one of the most prominent features of empowerment. Through active participation, people influence decisions determining the functioning and well-being of their societies, while positive outcomes of those decisions reinforce their empowerment.

8. The precise meaning of empowerment may vary from person to person according to their historical, social or cultural background. In the context of social development, empowerment can be described as enhancing the capabilities of all individuals and groups, in particular vulnerable social groups and people living in poverty, to participate fully in all aspects of society and to exercise greater choice and control over their own well-being. Empowerment gives people choices and enables them to claim their rights, yet holds them accountable for their responsibilities. As such, empowered people can be active agents of change and driving forces for a more inclusive, sustainable path to development.

9. The process of empowerment involves both policies and an enabling environment that seek to enhance the choices and capacities of people, including political commitment to supporting effective participation and engagement; the provision of adequate financial resources; a strong, just and non-discriminatory legal framework; effective, transparent and accountable institutions that facilitate civic engagement and broad-based participation; the involvement of people in the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies; and public and private investment in human resource development and capacity-building. In addition, efforts to promote empowerment should focus on transforming the mindsets, attitudes and behaviours of people.

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[2] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

3. Policies and strategies to promote the empowerment of people

Socioeconomic policies that promote inclusive and equitable growth and sustainable development

10. Achieving the empowerment of people requires that not only the consequences of economic downturns and policies that have increased inequality be addressed, but also the unresolved structural causes of poverty, inequality and exclusion, as well as unemployment and underemployment. A policy shift towards a more inclusive and equitable path to development is necessary. Such a transformative policy framework incorporates social protection, economic diversification, inclusive access to finance and employment-friendly policies that foster demand and enhance productive capacity.

11. The empowerment of people is directly impacted by strengthened human capacity. Ensuring equitable access to, and enhanced investment in, quality education, basic health care and skills training is essential, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Quality education and health services provide individuals, regardless of their background, with better opportunities to improve their livelihoods and well-being and increase future income prospects, thus gaining better control over their own destinies. In addition to the provision of financial resources, concrete and practical measures that are appropriate to the national and local contexts are necessary to remove cultural and physical barriers to equitable access to basic services.

12. Social protection is a critical tool for empowering people. Country experiences have shown that social protection can be effective in reducing poverty, inequality and exclusion, mitigating risks, building resilience, enhancing human capital and other assets and improving livelihoods, thereby empowering people socially and economically.[3] Well-designed social protection systems guarantee minimum or basic social security for all in the form of various social transfers (in cash or in kind), while enabling the targeting of those who are either left behind or temporarily in need. Social protection, with immediate impacts on sustaining livelihoods and lasting impacts on inclusive and equitable development, should be considered a long-term national investment.

13. Social protection systems, including policy, planning, legislation and monitoring instruments, should not only be developed within a national institutional framework, but also developed progressively to ensure sustainability. In recent years, the benefit of investing in social protection floors has been increasingly recognized.[4] Social protection floors[5] guarantee income security and access to essential social services for all, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups and to protecting and empowering people throughout their life cycle.

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[3] E/CN.5/2011/2, pp. 4-10, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), policy guidance note, "Social protection, poverty reduction and pro-poor growth", available from http://www.oecd.org/development/povertyreduction/43573310.pdf.

[4] Eveline Herfkens, "Enhancing the Millennium Development Goals: reducing inequalities and improving coherence through social protection floors", background paper prepared for the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group.

[5] Developed by the International Labour Organization and endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executives Board and by the Heads of State and Government at the United Nations Millennium Development Summit in 2010 as an integrated set of social policies.

14. A well-functioning and inclusive labour market is crucial to the empowerment of people, as secure and fairly remunerated jobs provide the main pathway to emerge from poverty. Predictable income, even in the informal sector, enables households to make long-term investments, particularly in children's education, thus breaking the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. Access to decent jobs is, therefore, a foundation for the empowerment of people, especially among the most vulnerable. Labour market policies and institutions, including a minimum wage, employment protection legislation and labour negotiations, play an important role in protecting and empowering workers and their families. Empowerment through economic institutions, such as cooperatives, also contributes to the creation of decent employment, as well as to poverty reduction and social integration.

Promoting broad-based participation in decision-making processes

15. Empowerment of people involves, first and foremost, ensuring the full participation of people in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The individual capacity to articulate interests, address needs and concerns and represent the collective voice must be strengthened if participation is to be meaningful. The effective participation of citizens is also vital to improving the accountability and transparency of national and local government.

16. In addition, the capacities of public institutions at the national and local level need to be strengthened to facilitate civic engagement and the broad-based participation of citizens. E-governance has drawn increasing attention as a potential "enabler" to facilitate civic participation. In some instances, there need to be formal institutional mechanisms and structures that promote the meaningful participation of citizens in policymaking and other decision-making processes, for example, town hall meetings, public hearings, regular periodical consultations, multi-stakeholder participatory forums and interactive dialogues. Their participation will create a sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, their own well-being. At the same time, their participation can make public policies and interventions more effective and responsive to individual needs, thus creating a virtuous circle.

Effective, responsive, transparent and accountable institutions

17. The Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development recognized that democracy and transparent, accountable governance in all sectors of society were indispensable for the realization of sustainable, people-centred social development.

18. Effective, transparent and accountable public institutions that are accessible to all people and responsive to their needs are a critical building block for the empowerment of people. Such institutions can ensure inclusive, equitable participation and fair access to social services and job opportunities; identify specific means of reflecting the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and populations; recognize and promote their capabilities, talents and experiences; and enable them to make a positive contribution to society. One of the ways of realizing this is to promote decentralization of public institutions and services to a level that would respond properly to local needs and facilitate local participation in coordination with national Governments. Further, clear rules and processes should be established for public and private institutions, to create transparency and accountability and prevent corruption.

Fair, non-discriminatory justice systems and legal frameworks

19. Everyone should be able to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the benefits of economic, social, cultural and political development and be responsible for the betterment of their own lives. Governments have the responsibility for promoting and protecting the rights of individuals, especially members of vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and people living in poverty.

20. Lowering legal barriers to participation in all aspects of life is a fundamental step towards the empowerment of people. Identifying and amending — or eliminating — discriminatory laws based on gender, age, residence, language, religion and ethnicity or other background is essential to reducing inequality and exclusion. Several mandates have been established since the World Summit for Social Development to address the situation of vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, older persons, young people and indigenous peoples. Many Governments have introduced policies to combat exclusion, particularly of the most marginalized groups. In this regard and where appropriate, the ratification of existing international human rights conventions and the accelerated implementation of the provisions of conventions and covenants should be promoted. Furthermore, it is crucial to provide all people with the benefit of independent, fair and effective judicial systems and access to competent sources of advice about their legal rights and obligations.

Enhanced access to information, knowledge, and innovation

21. Access to a wide range of information, knowledge and opinions, which enable people to have choices and make informed decisions, is essential to the empowerment of people. Thanks to technological advances in recent years, access to information and knowledge has become timelier and more affordable. While the digital divide remains a challenge, barriers to access to information and communications technologies have been progressively lowered, as the use of such services, especially mobile cellular services, has expanded greatly worldwide.[6] Mobile technology is empowering people across regions by providing interfaces for innovative approaches in education, health, public administration, banking, business and connecting people. Public policies should foster the wider use of such technologies, the development of technological infrastructure and public access thereto, engagement in public-private partnerships and the promotion of content in indigenous and local languages.

22. Information and knowledge-sharing is becoming increasingly important to the promotion of innovation and increased productivity. There has been a transformation in patterns of innovation, from confined and hierarchical models to more open and collaborative ones. Drawing on knowledge from multiple sources across different disciplines, the open model is more likely to lead to innovative solutions. These collaborative interactions by multiple actors make knowledge widely available and affordable, which benefits vulnerable and disadvantaged populations and communities. Open sources of information and knowledge-sharing

[6] At present, there are an estimated 6.8 billion mobile-cellular subscribers globally, almost as many as people in the world, with more than half in the Asia-Pacific region (3.5 billion). Mobile-cellular penetration rates stand at 96 per cent globally, 128 per cent in developed countries and 89 per cent in developing countries. Almost 40 per cent of the world's population (2.7 billion people) are online. See ITU, "The world in 2013: ICT facts and figures", available from http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013.pdf.

should be encouraged further and facilitated within and across regions. Governments could enhance the reliability, validity and utility of statistical data and other information and make them accessible for public use. International and regional organizations could provide interfaces for exchanging good practices and lessons learned and make valuable knowledge available at minimum or no cost.

B. The special needs of Africa and the least developed countries

1. The special needs of Africa

23. The New Partnership for Africa's Development has continued to make progress in delivering on the promise of the continent in a number of areas. Considerable progress has been made in improving living conditions and reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty, as well as in education, health and nutrition outcomes. These gains are being supported by some of the fastest-growing economies in the world and enhanced domestic resource mobilization efforts, stronger partnerships and better policy coherence, both at the continental level and within countries. While the global economy is expected to grow at 2.3 per cent in 2013 and is projected to grow at 3.1 per cent in 2014, Africa is expected to grow by 4.6 per cent in 2013 and 5.1 per cent in 2014.[7] The continuing strong economic performance of Africa has been more than a resource boom. Political stability, improved macroeconomic governance and a growing middle class are complementing the contribution of increased exports of primary commodities.

24. However, this relatively high-growth experience has not been shared by all countries, resulting in considerable cross-country diversity and intracountry disparities in poverty eradication and employment creation. The proportion of people whose incomes were less than $1.25 a day stood at 48.5 per cent in 2010 in sub-Saharan Africa, down from 56.5 per cent in 1990. However, despite the welcome decline in the poverty headcount rate, the absolute number of people living on less than $1.25 a day actually went up in the region, from 289.7 million people in 1990 to 413.7 million people in 2010. Failure to reduce the number of the extreme poor was accounted for partly by the quality of growth, which has not been as inclusive and equitable as needed. The continued export of natural resources has been a key driver of high rates of economic growth, but it has not been accompanied by a structural transformation of African economies. Neither has the overreliance on exports of primary commodities resulted in significant improvement in the quantity and quality of jobs. An estimated 86 per cent of workers in sub-Saharan Africa were either poor, or near poor, in 2011. The unemployment situation has remained dire in North Africa too, where the unemployment rate was estimated to have been 10 per cent in 2011 and 10.3 per cent in 2013.[8] Urgent action is required to put in place macroeconomic and social policies that would prioritize the creation of productive employment opportunities and human resource development, augment the provision of social protection and tackle inequality.

25. Furthermore, failure to boost the productivity of agriculture, particularly smallholder agriculture, has continued to undermine poverty eradication efforts in

[7] United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2013* (New York, 2013). Update as of mid-2013.

[8] International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends 2013: Recovering from a Second Jobs Dip* (Geneva, 2013).

rural areas where the majority of the African poor live and work. In 2012, the share of employment in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa stood at 62 per cent. In 1991, the share was 67.5 per cent. More concerted public and private efforts are required to boost smallholder productivity. These efforts should include scaling up public investments in agriculture in line with the 2003 African Union Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security, attracting private investment in agriculture, improving the quality and quantity of rural extension services and ensuring that smallholder farmers have access to improved seed varieties, fertilizers, irrigation, credit and markets.

26. Progress on other social development goals across Africa has remained mixed, with many countries lagging behind the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate hunger, improve maternal health, curb child mortality and improve access to water and sanitation. North African countries have reached the targets on poverty and access to improved sanitation and considerable progress is being made in achieving universal primary education and gender equality. In sub-Saharan Africa, rates of primary school enrolment and completion are improving. Under-five child mortality continues to fall and steady progress is being made towards gender parity. Immunization coverage is improving and there have been reductions in the rates of HIV prevalence and HIV incidence and malaria-related deaths.[9]

27. However, many African countries continue to face challenges that include rising inequality, youth unemployment and volatile commodity prices. In addition, social and economic progress is being hampered by protracted political uncertainty in North Africa and political instability in the Sahel region, the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. The public debt overhang in the eurozone is also impacting negatively the economies of those countries that have strong linkages with the eurozone, such as South Africa and several countries in North Africa, hitting key drivers of growth, including trade, manufacturing and foreign direct investment inflows.

2. Special needs of the least developed countries

28. An assessment of the first two years of implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action) showed mixed results.[10] In general, the least developed countries have made some progress on many of the goals and targets, despite the negative impacts of the decelerating global economy, such as a decline in foreign direct investment and decreasing official development assistance. Some of the least developed countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania) have sustained high growth rates, close to or above 7 per cent in 2011, while growth rates in some of the larger least developed countries (Angola and Sudan) were well below their decade averages, due largely to declining oil production. As a result, the average GDP growth rate for the least developed countries was estimated to have decelerated to 3.3 per cent in 2012.

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[9] African Union Commission, Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme, *MDG Report 2012: Assessing progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals* (Addis Ababa, 2012).

[10] A/68/88-E/2013/81.

29. Although some social indicators demonstrated moderate progress, for example an increase in the enrolment rate in primary education and a decline in child mortality rates, especially in the least developed countries in the Pacific, most have continued to face persistent poverty, inequality, low productivity, insufficient creation of decent jobs and a high degree of exposure to shocks and disasters. Some of them have been vulnerable to political tensions, growing insecurity and poor weather conditions. Structural change seems to be taking hold in some of the least developed countries which have sustained high economic growth. Due largely to increasing investment and rapid urbanization, the share of agriculture in those countries has decreased to the benefit of manufacturing, services and mining. However, economic growth has not translated into meaningful poverty reduction in many of them. Poverty rates have continued to be alarmingly high, with half of the 880 million population in the least developed countries living on less than $1.25 a day, posing a serious challenge to achieving the goals of the fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Istanbul in 2011, and the Millennium Development Goals. Nonetheless, there are some encouraging signs that many of the least developed countries have integrated the priorities and goals of the Istanbul Programme of Action into their national development plans and strategies. A few countries have announced their intention of graduating from least developed country status by, or around, the end of the decade in 2020. Many donors have streamlined their development aid strategies to become more focused, less fragmented and more effective.

C. Implementation of programmes related to social groups and social integration

30. Social integration envisions all individuals and groups sharing in the benefits of economic growth and participation in all facets of society. However, social exclusion remains pervasive, with many social groups distinctly disadvantaged across social, economic and other dimensions of well-being. There is a need to intensify efforts to reduce inequality and promote the rights and welfare of vulnerable individuals and social groups.

31. Inclusive policies across sectors foster empowerment and social justice, growth and poverty reduction and political stability, from which all members of society benefit. In particular, the pursuit of decent work for all has a key role in promoting empowerment and social integration through the range of opportunities it enables.

32. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted in 2006 and entered into force in 2008, has been ratified by 132 countries and signed by 155 countries as of June 2013. The Optional Protocol to the Convention has 77 ratifications and 91 signatories. The number of ratifications and signatories has risen steadily, whereas there remains a considerable gap between commitment to the Convention and its Optional Protocol and development policy and practices on the ground. As the deadline to meet the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 draws near, the international community is calling for enhanced efforts and concrete actions to achieve the Goals among persons with disabilities and to mainstream a disability perspective into development agendas towards 2015 and beyond. The way in which societies regard disability has evolved further through this process, through

increased recognition that persons with disabilities are equal rights-holders and should be included as both agents and beneficiaries of development.

33. It is estimated that 1 billion people, or 15 per cent of the population worldwide, live with disabilities, yet persons with disabilities have been invisible in many development frameworks and often excluded from full participation in economic, social and other domains. It is necessary to take account of, and respond explicitly to, the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities in shaping the global development agenda, through participatory approaches. Accordingly, in 2011 in resolution 66/124, the General Assembly decided to hold a high-level meeting on disability at the level of Heads of State and Government. The high-level meeting, to take place on 23 September 2013, will have as its theme "The way forward: a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond". Among the priorities reported by multiple stakeholders are greater accessibility, participation in decision-making processes and capacity-building, improved data on disability and quality education, training and decent work opportunities and inclusion of disability perspectives in disaster preparedness and management.[11]

34. Indigenous peoples around the world experience disproportionate levels of poverty and are likely to have lower educational outcomes and employment rates than non-indigenous peoples. The recent twelfth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which focused on culture, education and health and the implementation of recommendations in those areas, underscored these significant gaps across indicators of well-being. The promotion of the rights of indigenous youth and indigenous persons with disabilities has emerged as a priority area for the future work of the Permanent Forum. The participants in the Permanent Forum urged Member States and the United Nations system to include indigenous holistic concepts of development and practices in the current processes of the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 and in the sustainable development goals. Indigenous peoples have referred consistently to the lack of focus on these issues in the Millennium Development Goals and to the way in which the lack of disaggregated data made them invisible in development plans and in the aggregate data presented by States.

35. In its resolution 65/198, the General Assembly decided to hold a high-level plenary meeting in 2014, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to exchange views and good practices on the fulfilment of the rights of indigenous peoples and to advance the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The preparatory process has led to the identification of four overarching themes that capture priorities as concrete recommendations for inclusion in the final outcome document of the World Conference: the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples; United Nations action for the implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples; the implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples; and the priorities of indigenous peoples for development, including the right to free, prior and informed consent. The World Conference is expected to contribute indigenous perspectives to the formulation of the global development agenda beyond 2015 and to the sustainable development goals.

[11] A/67/211.

36. The family plays a critical role in society and in development. Socioeconomic, demographic and cultural changes, however, are presenting new and increasing challenges for families in fulfilling their economic, caring, nurturing and other roles. Social policies must be tailored to meet the evolving needs of families and to strengthen their cohesion, so that they can fulfil those roles to the benefit of all their members and society at large. Family-focused policies such as cash transfers for families with young children or subsidized housing for low-income families, can contribute to ending the intergenerational cycle of poverty and improving the living conditions of vulnerable families. At the same time, family policies are increasingly recognizing the need to support a work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity, which will grow in importance due to employment and ageing trends. The year 2014 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Preparations for its observance have been focused on family-oriented policies and strategies to reduce family poverty, promote a work-family balance and support social integration and intergenerational solidarity. A review of family-oriented policies across regions and an exchange of good practices in family policymaking are under way to highlight appropriate strategies to improve the well-being of families.

37. In 2012, the Secretary-General identified working with and for women and young people as one of the top priorities for his second term. His Five-Year Action Agenda delineated the objective of addressing the needs of young people by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes on employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights and education, including sexual and reproductive health. The United Nations system is implementing an action plan and has developed a youth volunteer modality under the umbrella of the United Nations Volunteers programme to help advance this agenda. Additionally, the Secretary-General appointed an envoy on youth in January 2013, who has been charged with developing this work.

38. Rates of youth unemployment, youth working poverty and other gaps in decent work among youth have grown sharply since the onset of the financial and economic crisis, reaching crisis levels in many countries such as Spain and Greece. In addition to posing immediate challenges to youth development, extended periods of unemployment and underemployment put young people on a long-term path of disadvantage in terms of job opportunities, wages and development of skills. Moreover, the employment situation of young people has significant implications for broader social trends and political issues, such as family formation and civil unrest. Countries are especially concerned about generating employment opportunities and promoting skills training, vocational education and entrepreneurship for youth. There is broad support for the resolution entitled "The youth employment crisis: a call for action", adopted at the 101st International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2012, which set out various measures that could be taken by Governments and other stakeholders.

39. A number of countries have made considerable progress in enhancing the inclusion of older persons, through policies and programmes to extend workforce participation and other types of participation, ensuring the sustainability of pension and social security systems and, in some cases, instituting basic social pensions, as well as providing age-appropriate health-care services. Older persons in developed and developing countries have continued to be more likely to experience income insecurity and poor access to health care and other social services than an average

member of the population. Social exclusion and poverty have remained significant barriers to the well-being of older persons.

40. The second review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, which took place in 2012, revealed several common challenges confronted by older persons, including age-based discrimination, violence and abuse, barriers to employment, lack of age-appropriate health services and uneven provision of social protection, particularly in developing countries. Progress in implementation has been limited and uneven, suggesting that national capacities on ageing must be strengthened considerably through the mobilization of adequate resources, as well as the forging of partnerships with all stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels. Member States are currently discussing strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons, with deliberations ongoing as to the appropriate means for achieving that objective. The fourth session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, established by the General Assembly in resolution 65/182, will take place in August 2013.

III. Effective integration of the social dimension of sustainable development in the global development agenda beyond 2015

A. The social dimension of sustainable development

41. The international development paradigm is at a critical juncture, as the 2015 deadline approaches for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which were set on the basis of the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 55/2. While the international community strives to meet the Goals and targets by 2015, extensive dialogue and preparations are also well under way to shape a global development agenda beyond 2015.

42. Reflection on the successes and gaps of the Millennium Development Goals has shed light on the uneven progress thus far. The overall progress that has been achieved towards most targets does not convey where improvements have been realized, how they have been distributed, or who has been left out. In fact, success has not occurred in equal measure across, or even within, countries, with divergent outcomes, particularly between regions and between rural and urban areas. Although the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty — arguably the most significant of all the targets — has been met already, most of that success has occurred within East Asia and China in particular. Despite progress made in reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, the slow pace of poverty reduction remains a concern in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, reductions in underweight prevalence among children have been greater in urban areas and in wealthier households than in rural areas and poorer households. Studies have continued to demonstrate that progress towards the Millennium Development Goals often fails to reach certain social groups, including indigenous persons and other ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, women and girls, migrants, older persons and young people who collectively continue to face disparities in well-being.[12]

[12] United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, *Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General* (New York, 2012).

43. It is evident that several vital social and economic issues have not been addressed sufficiently in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, such as decent and productive work for all, social protection, inequality and social exclusion, among others. This realization points to the need to refocus the attention of the international community on its vision of social justice and of inclusive and people-centred sustainable development.

44. In June 2012, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Member States called for the effective and balanced integration of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Governments underscored the need to continue to give the highest priority to eradicating poverty, along with promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting the environment, as both the foundation and the aim of sustainable development. They stressed further the need for economic growth to be sustained, inclusive and equitable and to address inequality and expand opportunities for all, elevating living standards, supporting equitable social development and inclusion and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and the ecosystem. The vision that emerged from the Conference has stimulated a rethinking of development and has called for a holistic approach that places equal emphasis on the three pillars of sustainable development.

45. The social dimension of sustainable development has so far received insufficient attention. The Conference on Sustainable Development, in focusing on development that is people-centred and inclusive, presented a critical opportunity to strengthen the social pillar and promote complementarities with environmental and economic development. Moreover, it concluded with an agreement among Member States that sustainable development, integrating social, economic and environmental dimensions, must be at the core of the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.

46. At its fifty-first session, the Commission for Social Development addressed the emerging issues of the social dimension in the global development agenda beyond 2015. It addressed the necessity of a robust social foundation for realizing sustainable, inclusive and equitable development, as inequality and lack of opportunities and participation are inextricably linked to poor economic and environmental outcomes. Social investments, such as accessible education and health systems, provision of decent work and universal social protection floors, contribute to environmental protection and economic growth through reducing vulnerability and strengthening adaptive and productive capacity, including for green jobs. Social processes and institutions are crucial to enabling social justice and equality in the context of economic growth and environmental protection. In this regard, the Commission asserted that the social dimension of sustainable development should be viewed as key to enabling transformative change across the economic, environmental and social spheres. Once the right policies are in place, social processes can be drivers of economic and environmental change.

B. Priority areas for inclusion in the global development agenda beyond 2015

47. In its deliberations at its fifty-first session in February 2013, the Commission for Social Development highlighted the need for policies to address the root causes

of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, rather than the social consequences of economic or political processes, and the social drivers of structural change as the means of achieving inclusive and sustainable development. In this regard, members of the Commission emphasized the importance of addressing the following priority areas in the global development agenda beyond 2015: inequality, social inclusion, empowerment and participation, full and productive employment and decent work and social protection.

48. Many individuals and social groups have benefited greatly from the Millennium Development Goals, whereas others have been left untouched or little helped by development and economic growth. Just 1 per cent of the global population owns nearly half of global wealth, whereas the poorest half of the population owns less than 1 per cent.[13] Inequality is detrimental not only to growth and poverty reduction but also to social cohesion. Unequal access to opportunities and basic social services leads to disparities in educational, health and employment outcomes, as well as in other measures of well-being. Severe inequality can lead further to social and political instability, generating risk and undermining future growth. Societies with lower levels of inequality outperform highly unequal societies in their rate of growth, ability to sustain growth and speed of recovery from economic downturns.[14]

49. Persistent and in many cases growing inequality is hindering efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is important to address the determinants of all forms of inequality, from income to gender and age, using a people-centred approach to enable inclusive and equitable growth. Social protection systems, investments in human capital, employment opportunities and civic engagement mechanisms are among policy measures that have helped to reduce inequality and social exclusion.

50. Empowerment and participation are elements essential to individual well-being and social inclusion. The long-term process of empowerment supports the capacity of individuals and social groups to participate fully in all spheres in life, including decision-making. It is critical to ensuring that solutions to global challenges are responsive to the needs and concerns of all people, particularly the most marginalized, and that people are key actors in implementing those solutions. Societies with high levels of political participation and civic engagement are better positioned to develop and implement policies and programmes that promote the three pillars of sustainable development effectively.

51. Measures that reduce or eliminate barriers to participation and those which promote decent work, civic engagement, basic services and productive resources for all, enable people to access and generate livelihood opportunities, hold decision makers accountable and be active partners in all three pillars of sustainable development. In particular, empowered individuals are better able to manage risk, protect their natural environment and adapt to a green economy.

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[13] World Economic Forum, *Global Risks 2012* (Geneva, 2012).

[14] Andrew G. Berg and Jonathan D. Ostry, "Inequality and unsustainable growth: two sides of the same coin?", Staff Discussion Note, No. SDN 11/08 (Washington, D.C., International Monetary Fund, 2011), and S. Chaudhuri and M. Ravallion, "Partially awakened giants: uneven growth in China and India", Policy Research Working Paper, No. 4069 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2006).

52. Despite recognition that decent work is essential to poverty reduction, growth and human well-being, 56 per cent of workers in developing countries were in vulnerable employment in 2012.[15] Lack of quality job opportunities has emerged as one of the key issues of widespread concern in the national and thematic consultations organized by the United Nations on the development agenda beyond 2015. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development echoed this concern, as it recognized the need to create an enabling environment to promote full employment and decent work for all and spelled out the policy means to do so.[16] Experience from recent decades has shown that policies that promote economic growth have not necessarily resulted in growing employment or decent work. This suggests that no single policy or set of labour market measures would be sufficient to end the jobs crisis. Addressing the decent employment challenge, the General Assembly called for a holistic and coherent policy approach.

53. Social protection and universal access to social services have been shown to reduce poverty and inequality and support socioeconomic development and the empowerment of individuals and families.[17] They foster human capital development and build resilience to economic shocks, yet just 20 per cent of the global population of working age have comprehensive access to social protection and more than 50 per cent are without any coverage. Greater efforts are needed to create and strengthen national social protection floors and to enable, broaden and ensure access to productive resources in order to reduce poverty, vulnerability, inequality and social exclusion in a sustainable way.

54. The indicators that will be selected to monitor progress towards the achievement of a global development agenda beyond 2015 have the potential to elucidate the distinct situations of disadvantaged and marginalized groups and individuals. A disaggregated approach to monitoring can thereby inform development efforts better, ensuring that they reach all persons, especially those most in need. Such an approach would empower excluded individuals and social groups, improve accountability and enhance prospects for realizing the future we want. It will also be important to strengthen data quality and data collection at the national and subnational levels, including through capacity-building in monitoring implementation through participatory processes inclusive of multiple stakeholders.

IV. Recommendations

55. In order to accelerate progress towards the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and other social development goals, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) **The empowerment of people should be considered as an approach to advancing social development. Policies aimed at reducing poverty, promoting employment and social integration and those intended to foster the greater empowerment of people should be mutually reinforcing. The promotion of**

[15] International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends 2013: Recovering from a Second Jobs Dip* (Geneva, 2013), p. 39.

[16] General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex, para. 23.

[17] *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization: Report of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2011) and *The Global Social Crisis: Report on the World Social Situation 2011* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.IV.12).

empowerment should go beyond group-specific approaches and focus comprehensively on people-centred development;

(b) The process of empowerment should seek to enhance the choices and capacities of people and foster the transformation of their mindsets. A combination of social benefits and tools, including equal access to quality education, skills training, information and communications technologies and effective health care and social protection schemes, can contribute to the empowerment of people while increasing productivity and reducing vulnerability;

(c) Governments should place particular emphasis on achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth and on creating an enabling environment to promote productive employment and decent work and opportunities through investing in human resources and human capital. Social protection systems should be developed within a national institutional framework and implemented progressively to ensure their sustainability;

(d) Governments should establish and expand effective and transparent institutions and mechanisms that foster participation and civic engagement; they should undertake broad-based consultations with citizens to reflect their needs and concerns in policymaking processes and assess how socioeconomic policies impact their daily lives;

(e) Enhanced efforts should be made to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, rather than the social consequences of economic or political processes, and the social drivers of structural change, in order to progress towards inclusive and sustainable development;

(f) More concerted efforts are required to boost smallholder productivity, including scaling up public investment in agriculture, attracting private investment into agriculture, improving the quality and quantity of rural extension services and ensuring that smallholder farmers have access to the necessary resources, assets and markets;

(g) In formulating the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, inequality, social inclusion, empowerment and participation, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social protection should be given priority attention. A disaggregated approach to monitoring can ensure that policies reach all persons, especially those most in need. Such an approach would empower excluded individuals and social groups, improve accountability and enhance prospects for realizing the future we want.